

October 17, 2001

Dear Federally Permitted Tilefish Vessel Owner:

The Fishery Management Plan for Golden Tilefish, which is effective on **November 1, 2001**, establishes an annual commercial quota for the golden tilefish fishery. As a requirement of the golden tilefish permit, you must report to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) all fish and shellfish pounds landed or discarded including all tilefish species. To ensure that only golden tilefish are counted against the quota for that species, it is important that you differentiate the different tilefish species when reporting your catch. We have put together the following history of the tilefish fishery and a description of the habitat, distribution, and life history of tilefish.

Identifying tilefish species

The three most common tilefish species landed in the Atlantic Ocean north of the Virginia/North Carolina border are the golden tilefish, the blueline or gray tilefish, and the sand tilefish. In order to help you provide NMFS with the correct species information, a chart identifying the physical characteristics of these three species is attached. The characteristics of these species are also described below and the corresponding **species codes** are provided for use on the Fishing Vessel Trip Reports (FVTRs).

Golden Tilefish - VTR species code: TILEG

There are two features that distinguish the golden tilefish from the blueline and sand tilefish. The golden tilefish has a yellow fleshy tab on top of its head just above the eye and its dorsal fin is spiny with large yellow spots. The body color is bluish green with many yellow spots on the upper body.

Blueline Tilefish - VTR species code: TILEB

The blueline tilefish has a long snout with a narrow gold stripe underlined in blue. It has a dark predorsal midline and soft dorsal fin rays, without spines.

Another common name for blueline tilefish is gray tilefish. Please use the species code *TILEB* when filling out your VTRs for either gray or blueline tilefish.

Sand Tilefish - VTR species code: TILES

The sand tilefish has a long and slender body that is generally pale gray to tan in color with a bluish tint. The tail is crescent shaped with a dusky area above the center of the fin and very long lobes, which are orangish in color.

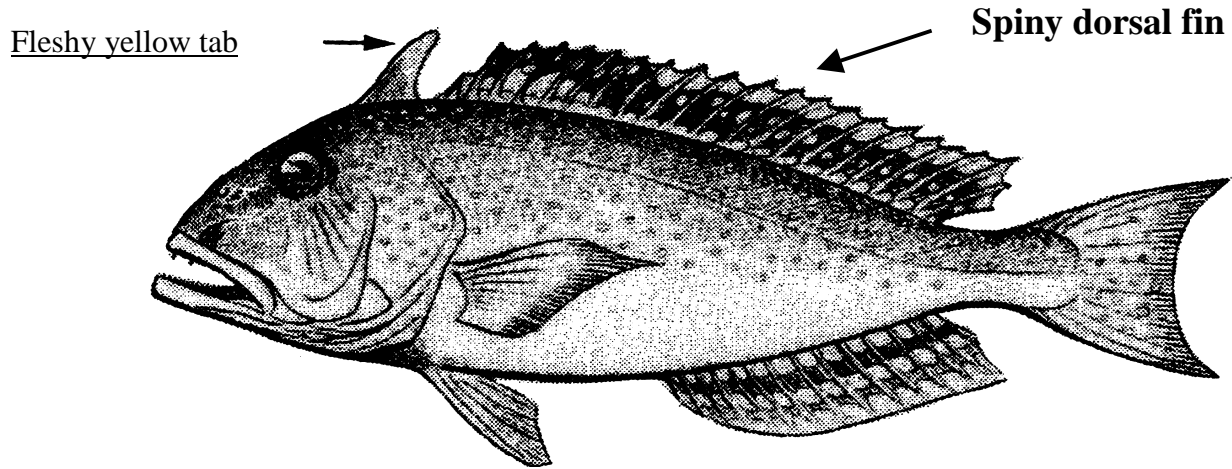
For additional information, please contact the following:

IVR information	Fisheries Statistics Office	(978) 281-9296 or 9209
FVTR information	Fisheries Statistics Office	(978) 281-9246
Federal Permits	Permit Office	(978) 281-9370
Other reporting information	Local Port Agent	See attached list
Other reporting information	Regional Office Email	reporting.ne@noaa.gov
Information mentioned in this letter	Fisheries Statistics Office Website	http://www.nero.nmfs.gov

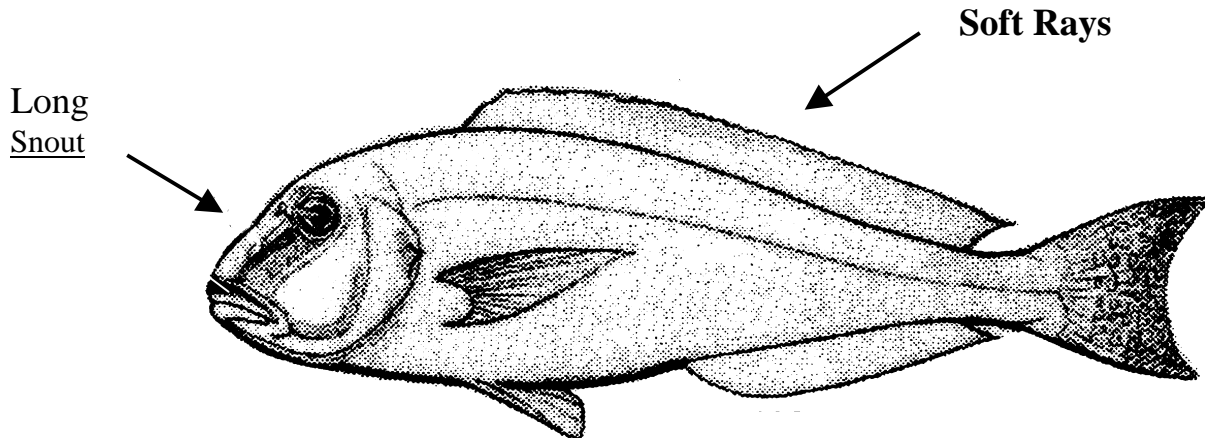
Sincerely,

John F. Witzig, Ph.D.
Chief, Fisheries Statistics Office

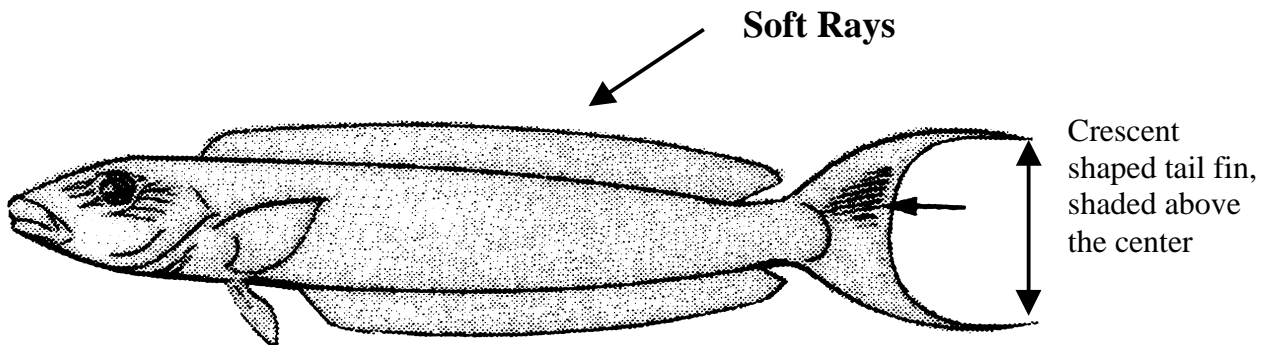
Identifying Characteristics of the Common Tilefish Species in North Atlantic Waters



Golden Tilefish



Blueline or Gray Tilefish



Sand Tilefish

Tilefish
by
Paul Nitschke

Tilefish, *Lopholatilus chamaeleonticeps*, inhabit the outer continental shelf from Nova Scotia to South America, and are relatively abundant in the southern New England to mid-Atlantic area at depths of 80 to 440 m (44 to 240 fathoms). They are generally found in and around submarine canyons where they occupy burrows in the sedimentary substrate. Tilefish are relatively slow growing and long-lived, with a maximum observed age and length of 35 years and 110 cm (43.3 in.) for females and 26 years and 112 cm (44.1 in.) for males. At lengths exceeding 70 cm (27.6 in.), the predorsal adipose flap, characteristic of this species, is larger in males and can be used to distinguish the sexes. Tilefish of both sexes are mature at ages of 5 to 7 years.

Nominal catches were first recorded in 1915 (148 mt); a record total of 4,500 mt was taken in 1916, but only 5 mt were reported for 1920. Landings later increased to 1,000 to 1,500 mt during the early 1950s, followed by a decline to 30 mt in 1968-1969. Beginning in the early 1970s, a directed commercial longline fishery expanded rapidly in the Mid-Atlantic, and longlines have since been the predominant gear type used. Landings increased to 4,000 mt in 1979 before declining to about 2,000 mt annually from 1982-1986. More recent landings have generally been lower; the 1994-1998 average was 1,100 mt. A small recreational fishery developed during the late 1960s in New York and New Jersey but landings never exceeded 100 mt, and recent recreational catches have been negligible.

Landings and CPUE data indicate that tilefish were overexploited during the height of the longline fishery (between 1977 and 1982). Landings during this period were well above levels corresponding to long-term potential yield. This period was marked by steadily declining landings and CPUE, average landed size, and size at first maturity in males. Standardized CPUE for vessels in Barnegat, NJ declined from 0.21 kg/tub fished in 1973 to 0.05 kg in 1982, while the NEFSC standardized CPUE series for vessels in the Middle Atlantic-Southern New England region declined from 2.8 mt/days absent in 1979 to 0.45 mt in 1994. Since 1994, this index increased to 0.67 mt in 1998. Estimates of fishing mortality from virtual population analysis, or VPA, increased from 0.20 (1977) to 0.74 (1981). VPA estimates are not available for more recent years.

Long-term potential catch for tilefish is about 1,900 mt at $B_{msy} = 8,400$ mt as estimated from a nonequilibrium surplus production model. Biomass-weighted F in 1998 was estimated to be 0.45, about twice as high as $F_{msy} = 0.22$. The stock appears to have been stable at low levels of abundance in recent years. Total biomass in 1998 was estimated to be 2,900 mt, well below B_{msy} .